

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023*

**Remarks at the Belmont Water Treatment Plant in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**  
*February 3, 2023*

*[At the start of his remarks, the President brought Nolyn Pace, daughter of Get the Lead Out Riverwards founder Jana Curtis, who introduced the President, onstage. He addressed Nolyn, who suffered from lead poisoning in early childhood, as follows.]*

*The President.* I want you all to know—I want you to know, baby: You did so much for so many kids. Think about it. What you went through, you're changing the life of thousands and thousands and millions of kids in America. So we owe you a big round of applause.

And I love your earrings. *[Laughter]* Thank you.

Well, folks—hello, Philadelphia!

*Audience members.* Hello!

*The President.* I'm Jill Biden's husband. *[Laughter]* She's a Philly girl. So the first thing I'm going to say is: Go Eagles! Fly, Eagles, fly! Now, the good news is, I happen to mean it. But even if I didn't, I'd say it. You know why? Otherwise, I'd be sleeping alone. *[Laughter]*

She is—everybody, sit down. As the mayor knows, she is one self-assured Philly fan. *[Laughter]* No matter what. My wife hates violence, she says. But I told Bobby Casey this: We went to a Flyers game a couple years ago, and the fight—and the Secret Service is in a box next to us the—anyway. And there's a—a fight breaks out. And my wife, who hates violence, goes: "Hit him! Get him!" Jumping up. *[Laughter]* The Secret Service looking—"Where the heck did that come from?" *[Laughter]*

But anyway, thank you, Kamala. Thank you very much.

You guys don't have to stand up here. Come on. Why don't you go——

*[At this point, Vice President Kamala D. Harris, Ms. Curtis, and Nolyn Pace left the stage.]*

You've been a leader on this issue for a long time, because you know how much it matters.

And, Mayor Jim Kenney, thank you for the passport back into the city, man. *[Laughter]*

You know, for years and years, the—when Delaware didn't have its own television station before everything was Philadelphia, I was as popular in Philly as I was everywhere else. You know what I mean? They had to cover us, you know? I mean——

*Audience member.* *[Inaudible]*

*The President.* *[Laughter]* Well, I don't know about if I still am. *[Laughter]*

But I'm happy to be here with the new Governor, Josh Shapiro. Josh, you're going to be a great Governor.

And I'm mildly partial to Bob Casey. *[Laughter]* He's from Scranton. Not Scranton, Scranton. *[Laughter]* And he—we lived not very far from one another when I was up there as a kid. And I still go home.

And I want to thank you for—we're going to make sure, Bobby, that rail line goes back, like it was in 1970, from Scranton to New York. *[Laughter]* We're going to make sure that happens.

And, John Fetterman, you've been a great partner, pal. And you've only been there exactly 1 month. But you've been a fighter not only for Pittsburgh, but for the whole country.

And, Dwight Evans, you've been a good friend and a great supporter representing the community.

And look, the relentless work of other Members of Congress are helping make so much progress.

I want to thank our EPA Administrator, Michael Regan. He is doing a great job. He was down doing a great job in North Carolina, and we went—just stole him. Just flat stole him. [Laughter] But you're doing a great job, Michael. Thank you very much.

And thanks to the folks who run this plant and fix our water system here in Philly: AFSCME, plumbers and pipefitters, laborers—all helping deliver clean water.

And by the way, all this money we're spending, it's going to hire union workers. Union workers.

But before I begin, I want to say a word about the jobs report we talked about this morning. Next week, we're reporting on the state of the Union. I'll be doing that from the Capitol. And—but I reported today on the state of the economy.

This morning's report showed that we added—the economy is strong. We added more jobs—over half a million jobs this last month. And the recalibration of last month was another half a million. We've created 12 million jobs—12 million jobs—since we took office. That's the strongest 2-year growth in the history and by a long shot.

And I want to thank the Members of Congress here who are the ones who supported that, my initiatives that have made this possible.

Look, my dad used to have an expression. He'd say: "Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about respect. It's to be able to look your kid in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay.'" There's now 12 million more Americans who can look at their kid and say, "It's going to be okay."

And what it's done mostly is provide dignity for those families—dignity to be able to do that. Because there's nothing worse than not being able to provide for your family as a mother or a father. And it gives people a sense of self-worth.

We're here today to talk about the progress we're making in rebuilding America's infrastructure. And with the help of this delegation, I signed the bipartisan infrastructure law, a once-in-a-generation investments, putting Americans to work to rebuild our Nation's roads, highways, bridges, railroads, ports, airports, high-speed internet, our water systems, and so much more.

I was given a copy of a speech that I made about 30 years ago, saying we need an infrastructure bill to deal with water. I'm not joking. I had forgotten that they just—they dug it up for me. But the point is, we've been needing this for a long time. This is not new. I remember starting off and working like hell on the lead paint initiative because that was such a problem.

I've traveled the country in recent weeks and seen this law in action. A massive new bridge over the Ohio River between Kentucky and Ohio. A huge tunnel along the Amtrak line in Baltimore and New York—billions of dollars. Pennsylvania alone is going to get 8-1—8-point—it got \$8.1 billion so far, as the Gov can tell you.

And just outside Pittsburgh, because of the Senator, we just spent \$850 million to replace a hundred-year-old bridge and the Montgomery Lock and Dam system that's critical to our Nation's economy is coming. An investment to increase the capacity of the system by over 50 percent at a critical chokepoint. You know, Bobby Casey has been talking to me about this for so long, I think we're going to call it the "Casey Lock"—[laughter]—when it's done.

But look, I'm here today to talk about an issue affecting Americans across the country: water. You think it's silly, but water—you know, the issue has to do with basic dignity. Every American deserves to be able to turn on their water tap or faucet and be able to drink clean water. The—we're the richest, most prosperous nation in the world. Water ought to be something that's just guaranteed. But, unfortunately, that's not the case.

Right now there are an estimated 160,000 service lines carrying water into homes and schools in Pennsylvania, including an estimated 20,000 lines for homes here in the State of—in the city of Philadelphia. Ten million families across the country and hundreds of thousands of schools and—where schoolchildren and daycare centers exist that their water is pumped through lead pipes, lead valves, and lead fixtures.

And, folks, look, the problem is almost in every State, but it's especially bad in older cities in the Midwest and here in the Northeast. Many houses built in the last century, and the average age of water and sewer pipes in the U.S. is nearly 50 years old. And they're often even older in major cities like Philadelphia. Many water mains and pipes in the country are nearing the end of their useful lives.

And our water systems break down, the pipes start to deteriorate, exposure to lead in pipes increases. And beyond lead pipes, there are as many as 24 million housing units that have significant, significant problems with lead-based paint.

And here's why it matters. I know we talk about it generically, but it really matters. Exposure to lead impacts children's brain development. It's hazardous to their health. No amount of lead in water is safe. None. No amount is safe. It can damage the brain and kidneys, interfere with the production of red blood cells that the body needs to carry oxygen.

And despite these dangerous health effects, the CDC estimates that over half of American children could be exposed to lead, with the exposure often coming from their own homes. The problem disproportionately affects low-income families. As Dwight said, people of color are much more likely to live in homes where lead exposure is an issue.

This is the United States of America, for God's sake. This is the—we know better than that. And we know we're proving it.

Look, the Vice President and I made a commitment to replace every single service line in every part of the country over the next decade, by using—[applause]—not most, every. We're using every tool at our disposal to get it done.

When I took office, I signed the American Rescue Plan, which the Governor indirectly referred to, that sent \$350 billion to State and local governments. And we said they could use it for things like replacing lead lines and lead fixtures in their communities.

I'm proud the city of Pittsburgh used—Pittsburgh, now; I didn't—I'm not misspeaking here—[laughter]—used \$17.5 million as part of their plan to replace lead service lines in the city by 2026. They've got to do that through this State and throughout—we've got to do it throughout the country.

Today we're here to talk about a record funding for the infrastructure law that provides clean water with \$15 billion—with a "b"—set aside specifically for lead pipes or lead service removal. Pennsylvania, as referenced earlier, already has gotten \$240 million they can use to upgrade the water system, and they'll get an additional funding each year for the next 4 years.

They sent \$160 million of that money here to Philadelphia to upgrade water treatment plants and to replace older water mains and lead pipes. Philadelphia's Water Department is going to start by using the money to replace approximately 19 miles of 100-year-old water lines. They're 100 years old.

Today we're announcing a \$340 million loan, which is under a program that exists in the Government, of very low interest rates, and a stretched time to pay it back. And you'll be able to save a lot of money in the process, and lives.

The first \$20 million—the first \$20 million is going to replace 160 service lines and 15 miles of distribution mains, which are going to protect public health and prevent additional watermain breaks.

Look, we're also announcing that Pennsylvania is one of four States that's part of a new partnership with mayors and Governors and labor leaders to accelerate the replacement of lead pipes in places that need it the most, where their pipes haven't replaced—haven't been replaced for half a century.

We're not just doing this work here in Philly, we're doing it across the country, from coast to coast, in the American Heartland.

Just over a year ago, we launched the Lead Pipe and Paint Action Plan to coordinate 10 different Federal agencies—get all 10 of them together—so that we could pool money and get it out the door quickly.

Since the start of the Biden-Harris administration, we've already put more than \$5 billion to work in big cities. And places to work going to increase—and we're going to increase the amount of money in the years to come. This is a 10-year project for all of this work we're going to be doing. Not the individual project, but 10 years the money is going to be available.

And one of the things about infrastructure law that I'm most excited about is, we're doing this with American workers and with products made in America and with union labor. That's the condition we wrote into it.

And I know—and maybe even some of you, you think I'm too pro-union. Well, it's not—I'm—but I—there's a reason for this. You know, everybody talks about college education. Well, to be a plumber and pipefitter, what the hell do you think it takes? It takes you 4 to 5 years of an apprenticeship, like going back to school, like going to 4 years of college.

That's why we have the best workers in the world—the union workers—because they're the best trained in the world, and that's not hyperbole. Laborers, plumbers, pipefitters, union, electricians, carpenters, cement masons, ironworkers, steelworkers, communication workers, and so much more.

And, folks, look, these are good jobs you can raise a family on. And they don't require a college degree, because you have, in a sense, a college degree through the apprenticeship program, which is one reason why the United States, as I said, has the best trained workers in the world.

It'd be a digression to get into it, but we did the CHIPS and Science Act. Well, guess what? One of the people who is investing over—one of the companies investing over \$80 billion in that, I asked why they're investing in it. They said, "You have the best workers in the world." And it's coming out of South Korea. "The best workers in the world."

Let me close with this. Folks, this isn't complicated. Every person in this country deserves to be able to turn on a faucet and have clean drinking water. And through the infrastructure law, we're making historic investments to make sure that they can.

When America sees us making these investments all across America—replacing these pipes, building roads and bridges and—it sends a message: We can really do big things.

I think America, over the previous 5, 6, 7 years, began to wonder whether we could do big things. There's nothing—and I mean this. Think about this now, from a historical perspective.

There's nothing we've ever set our mind to as a country that we haven't succeeded in doing. Nothing. Nothing.

We're the only country in the world that comes out of every crisis stronger than we went in. And that's what we're doing on the economy now, and that's what we're doing under this infrastructure legislation. We can move this Nation forward.

And I want to send another message too. It's a message of pride: pride in our country, pride in our capability. Pride. Pride in what we can do when we do it together. And it generates a sense of self-worth. It generates a sense of self-worth, knowing that you can provide for your family.

I've long said: It's never been a good bet—never, ever been a good bet to bet against America. And I can honestly say—and I mean this sincerely—and a lot of Philadelphians know me; I've been around for a long time: I have never, ever, ever, ever been more optimistic about America's chances in the world than I am today. Never.

We're at one of those inflection points in world history where things are going to change dramatically over the next couple of years. And what we do over the next couple of years is going to determine—next 4 or 5 years—what the country is going to look like and the world is going to look like 20, 30 years from now.

We reach those inflection points every five or six generations, maybe fewer. And that's who we are. We're leading the world once again. We are the nation that the rest of the world looks to. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was right. We are the "essential nation."

We've got to remember who in God's name we are. We're the United States of America. There is nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity. Nothing.

And the least we can do—although it's going to be incredibly expensive and take a little bit of time—is make sure that those 400,000 schools and daycare centers and the like, when they turn on water at that school, their tap and the fountain, that that water is clean and pure. We owe it to our kids and grandkids.

God bless you all. And thank you for what you're doing.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:16 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Sens. Robert P. Casey, Jr., and John K. Fetterman; and Rep. Dwight E. Evans.

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